

# Reducing Your Risk of Dementia

## Healthy Lifestyle Choices That May Help Lower Your Risk of Dementia



**A**s you age, you may have increased concerns about developing dementia. Dementia is the loss of cognitive functioning — thinking, remembering, and reasoning — to such an extent that it interferes with a person's daily life and activities.

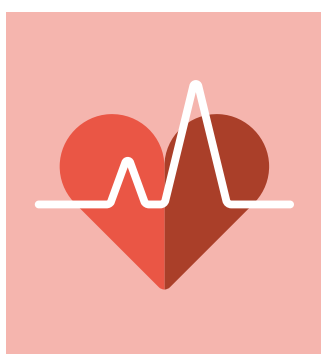
While many factors that may influence risk of dementia, such as genetics and environment, are beyond your control, there may be steps you can take to lower your risk. Observational studies show that people who practice healthy behaviors tend to have a lower risk of dementia. However, these findings must be further tested in clinical trials to determine which healthy lifestyle behaviors can prevent or delay dementia in some people based on individual risk factors.

Understanding risk factors and the choices you can make is important for your health — both now and later.



# What Can You Do?

Although we don't yet know for certain what, if anything, can prevent dementia, in general, leading a healthy lifestyle may help address risk factors that have been associated with dementia. Below are some ways you can help manage these risk factors.



**Control high blood pressure.** High blood pressure has harmful effects on the heart, blood vessels, and brain, and increases the risk of stroke

and vascular dementia. Treating high blood pressure with medication and healthy lifestyle changes, such as exercising and quitting smoking, may help reduce the risk of dementia.



**Maintain a healthy weight.** Adults with overweight or obesity have an increased risk for related health problems such as diabetes and

heart disease. Being active and choosing healthy foods can help achieve or maintain a healthy weight.

**Manage blood sugar.** Higher than normal levels of blood sugar, or glucose, can lead to diabetes and may increase the risk of heart disease, stroke, cognitive impairment, and dementia. Making healthy food choices, getting regular exercise, quitting smoking, and checking glucose levels can help manage blood sugar.



**Eat a healthy diet.** Aim for a mix of fruits and vegetables, whole grains, lean meats and seafood, unsaturated fats such as olive oil,

low-fat or nonfat dairy products, and limit other fats and sugars.



**Keep physically active.** Physical activity has many health benefits, such as helping to prevent overweight and obesity, heart disease, stroke,

and high blood pressure. Aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity each week.

**Stay mentally active.** Lots of activities can help keep your mind active, including reading, playing board games, crafting or taking up a new hobby, learning a new skill, working or volunteering, and socializing.



**Stay connected with family and friends.** Connecting with people and engaging in social activities can prevent social isolation and

loneliness, which are linked to higher risks for cognitive decline and Alzheimer's disease.



**Treat hearing problems.** Hearing loss may affect cognition and dementia risk in older adults and can make it more difficult to interact

with others. Protect your ears from loud sounds to help prevent hearing loss and use hearing aids if needed.

**Take care of your mental and physical health.** This includes getting your recommended health screenings, managing chronic health issues such as depression or high cholesterol, and regularly checking in with a health care provider.



**Sleep well.** Sleeping well is important for both your mind and body. Try to get seven to eight hours of sleep each night. Talk with a doctor if you are not getting enough sleep, are sleeping poorly, or think you may have a sleep disorder.



**Prevent head injury.** Take steps to prevent falls and head injury, such as fall-proofing your home and wearing shoes with nonskid soles that fully

support your feet. Consider participating in fall prevention programs online or in your area. Wear seatbelts and helmets to help protect you from concussions and other brain injuries.

**Avoid or limit alcohol.** Drinking too much alcohol can lead to falls and worsen health conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure, stroke, memory loss, and mood disorders. Experts recommend that men should not have more than two drinks a day and women only one.

**Stop tobacco use.** At any age, quitting smoking can improve your health and lower the risk of heart attack, stroke, and lung disease.

While researchers cannot yet say for certain whether making these lifestyle changes will protect against dementia, all are good for your health and are part of making healthy choices as you age.

# Dementia Prevention Research: How Can You Help?

More research is needed to find ways to help prevent Alzheimer's and related dementias. You can help researchers learn more about preventing dementia by participating in

clinical trials and studies. Search the Alzheimers.gov Clinical Trials Finder at [www.alzheimers.gov/clinical-trials](http://www.alzheimers.gov/clinical-trials) to find studies seeking volunteers.

## For More Information

### NIA Alzheimer's and Related Dementias Education and Referral (ADEAR) Center

800-438-4380

[adear@nia.nih.gov](mailto:adear@nia.nih.gov)

[www.nia.nih.gov/alzheimers](http://www.nia.nih.gov/alzheimers)

The NIA ADEAR Center offers information and free print publications about Alzheimer's and related dementias for families, caregivers, and health professionals. ADEAR Center staff answer telephone, email, and written requests and make referrals to local and national resources.

### Alzheimers.gov

[www.alzheimers.gov](http://www.alzheimers.gov)

Explore the Alzheimers.gov portal for information and resources on Alzheimer's and related dementias from across the federal government.



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